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## Representation in Children's Literature: An Analysis of Disability in Picturebooks

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# Representation in Children's Literature

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## An Analysis of Disability in Picturebooks

By  
Rebecca J. Tew

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Graduation from the  
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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## **Abstract**

In my project I will be analyzing how physical disabilities are portrayed in children's literature. Specifically, I will be doing a content analysis of four picture-books that have won the Schneider Family award, which is given to books that embody the disability experience for child or adult audiences. Using the guided questions from the article "Beyond the Medal: Representations of Disability in Caldecott Winners," I am going to determine if the characters with disabilities are portrayed in an ableist way. Appropriate representation is important for marginalized people, including people who have disabilities. Providing picturebooks that embrace disability rather than marginalize it has a positive impact on all children in a classroom.

The goal of my project is to create an understanding of the importance of non-ableist representation of characters with disabilities in picturebooks. After using the article to analyze the picturebooks, I will use the picturebooks that represent disabilities in an appropriate way as the basis of lesson plans to use in an elementary school classroom. The lesson plans will be centered around the importance of inclusion and lead to a discussion with students about why it is important to learn about people that might be different from them. I hope that

my lesson plans will be useful in my own future classrooms, and potentially the classrooms of other educators too.

### **Personal Interest**

Children's literature has something that has always been of interest to me. When I was young, I was fortunate enough to have my parents read to me quite frequently, which started my love of books. After taking Honors Children's Literature (ED 230H) my first year of college, my view of children's literature was broadened. In this class we talked about how important it was to have diversity in children's literature, which seems obvious but was not something I had considered much before. My goal is to be an elementary school teacher in the future. Since I will likely have students with disabilities, it will be important for them to feel comfortable in my class and I hope to create a classroom environment that fosters acceptance of all people. When I choose books for my classroom, I will use Rudine Sims Bishop's article "Mirrors, Windows and Sliding doors" as a guide, which talks about how books should represent students' own experiences, but also give them the opportunity to see differences as well.

I have decided to highlight books that feature characters with disabilities because of personal experiences I have with people who are disabled. I worked at a camp for five summers and there is one week every year where adults with

disabilities come and get to play, sing and be in community with each other. Working with these individuals was intimidating at first but soon became my most anticipated week of the summer. I believe that children should be exposed to characters with disabilities in the books they read so that they will not feel intimidated by the differences they see in people and instead feel comfortable. I also think that it is important for people (especially children) with disabilities to feel empowered and represented in the books that they are reading.

### **Literature Review**

Having representation in children's literature is proven to be beneficial for children. Rudine Sims Bishop has developed a concept known as "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors", that explains why this representation is so important. When a child sees themselves represented in the books that they are reading, it can boost how they feel about themselves and provide a positive example of someone else like them. This concept is the mirror aspect of the phrase because children are seeing themselves reflected in their books. On the flipside, not being represented in the literature that children read can have a negative impact on their self image. "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative or laughable, they learn about how they are devalued in society of

which they are a part” (Bishop paragraph 4). It is also important for children who are commonly represented to see other people in the books that they are reading, a concept that Bishop describes as windows. For readers who are only seeing reflections of themselves in books “they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world- a dangerous ethnocentrism” (Bishop paragraph 5). Bishop’s work on this issue has been looked at by many other researchers and has provided a basis of what to look for in children’s literature

Researchers Christina M. Tschida, Caitlin L. Ryan and Anne Swenson Ticknor expand on the concept of windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors in their own article published in 2014. They summarize what it means for a book to have windows and mirrors and provide their insight as to how to include this idea when teaching a preservice teacher. Tschida et al also introduce the concept of something having a single story, which can reinforce stereotypes and not allow someone’s entire story to be told. The article explains that “single stories are created when we show a people or an event as only one thing, over and over again, training us to see in this limited way. Over time, these single stories become so much a part of our lives that we are often unaware of the ways in which they operate” (Tshida et al, 30). These single stories often occur with books with characters and cultures that are different than are commonly represented in



books, which means they occur within books that are providing mirrors to the children who need it the most. However, unlike in Bishop's article, Tschida et al begin to explain that there are other ways in which diversity can occur than diversity in race. In the lesson they did with the preservice teachers based off of windows and mirrors, participants are asked to think about "race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, religion, geography, language, age, family structure, and so forth work to make them who they are" (30). Another aspect of someone's identity that is not mentioned in this article, but is still important to look at is their ability level.

In the article *What Disabilities Studies Can Do For Children's Literature*, researcher Kathy Saunders explains why it is important to have children's books that include characters that have disabilities. As shown by the other articles, "it is unusual to find discussions of disability issues in commentaries that examine broad genres of children's literature, although these texts have often included observations on race, gender or other major forms of bias" (Saunders paragraph 2). Examining disability in children's literature, though important, is a relatively new concept. The social model of disability can help when looking at disability in children's literature because it. This model "addresses the barriers to full participation in society caused by the practical, environmental, attitudinal or administrative framework of that society" (Saunders paragraph 10). The model

views that what is considered disability is actually a society's failure to include people regardless of their differences. When examining books that have characters with disabilities, using the social model "can help to identify hidden bias or ideological representations that might be otherwise non-critically assumed to describe the inevitable nature of life" (Saunders paragraph 9). Saunders offers a few examples of books that include characters with disabilities and provides some of her methods for looking at the credibility and accuracy of these books.

Wendy M. Smith-D'Arezzo provides additional information on how to effectively choose children's books that have characters with disabilities. In her article, *Diversity in Children's Literature: Not Just a Black and White Issue*, she describes research that she conducted that examined different books that include characters with disabilities. There were four aspects of the books that she identified that helped her analyze the thirty five books she chose. So, it is not enough for a picturebook to include a character with a disability, but the portrayal needs to be appropriate and the content of the book has to be good too. These aspects are: the structural elements should be well developed if not outstanding, the book should be appealing to children and show children with disabilities realistically, the book should strike an emotional chord in the teacher, and the book should present special education issues accurately (Smith-D'Arezzo

90). If a book does not meet all of these requirements, then it is not worth reading in a classroom, according to Smith-D'Arezzo. She compiled a list of thirty-five books that feature characters with disabilities that she went through and examined. There are other people who have done research on disability in children's literature that use a different method and criteria to analyze these books and their portrayal of these characters.

In their 2009 article *Beyond the Medal: Representations of disability in Caldecott winners*, Chloe Myers-Hughes and Hank Bersani Jr. compiled their list of criteria for what to look for when examining books that include characters with disabilities. Specifically, they looked at winners of the Caldecott award, which is given to picturebooks, that featured characters with disabilities. They made a list of ten guiding questions that a reader can ask themselves when they are reading books that feature characters with disabilities. This article reinforces the concept that just because a book has a character with a disability does not mean that their portrayal is appropriate or accurate. Myers-Hughes and Bersani Jr. urge readers to read these books carefully and critically to ensure that negative stereotypes and societal biases are not reinforced by the content of the book. Questions such as "Does the book promote positive self-image for people with disabilities?" and "Do loaded words convey negative messages about disability" and advice for readers to look at the copyright dates of books are included in the

article (Myers-Hughes and Bersani Jr. 27, 28, 31). Analyzing picturebooks is a process that takes knowledge of what the purpose of a picturebook is and is a skill that can be learned.

Lawrence R. Sipe and Carol Driggs Wolfenbarger describe how picturebooks are a unique visual art form and that it is important to analyze both the illustrations and the text when examining them. These books often have different spellings: picture book, picture-book or picturebook. The compound word of picturebook is seen to be the most accurate because it places equal emphasis on both parts of the word (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 273). The story of the picturebook is not complete if either element is missing. It is important to have both illustrations and text in a picturebook, but it is necessary to understand how the two interact with each other when analyzing these books. Sometimes the illustrations and text of a picturebook might send different messages, and it is up to the reader to decide what the story is really telling. "Readers work to resolve the conflict between what they see and what they read or hear. Satisfying picturebooks create a playing field where the reader explores and experiments with relationships between words and the pictures" (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 274). There are different degrees to which pictures and text interact with one another in picturebooks, and understanding these can also aid in visual analysis of picturebooks.

According to Kathleen Ellen O’Neil, there are four ways in which illustration and text can interact. Illustrations can reinforce the text, which means the pictures included in the book support what the text is saying. Picturebooks that have this interaction are especially easy for younger readers to comprehend. Illustrations can also work to further describe a character or setting that is mentioned in the text. The third idea that O’Neil explains is the concept of illustrations being a reciprocal to the text, in which illustrations have more agency in telling the story, though the text is still important. Picturebooks can additionally have an “establishing” relationship between illustrations and text in which illustrations tell a parallel story that expands or contradicts the one told by words alone. Understanding these interactions is important when examining all picturebooks, but especially when looking at books that include characters with disabilities. Since some disabilities are physical and can be visibly drawn, illustrations may send a negative message about disability. The words may say one thing about a character with disabilities while illustrations completely contradict them, and vice versa. Myers-Hughes and Bersani Jr. include a guided question in their article that addresses this issue. “Do the illustrations promote ableism by addressing disability in stereotyped ways?” (27). Outstanding picturebooks can be given awards by the American Library Association (ALA) for different reasons. With the fairly recent push of intentionally including children’s

literature that feature characters with disabilities, there is now an ALA award specifically for books with characters with disabilities.

The Schneider Family Book Award was established in 2003 by Dr. Katherine Schneider and her family because she noticed that there was a lack of children's literature that included the disability experience in them. Dr. Schneider started the award in honor of her father because he was candid in the way that he discussed disability and because she had experience with family members who lived with different disabilities. Katherine herself is blind and grew up with a librarian at the Michigan Library for the Blind as her hero (Schneider paragraph 1). Now, it is the job of the jury for this award to annually select three books with characters who experience disability. The three categories of winners for this book are based on the age of the intended audience, with one selection for younger children aged 0 to 8, middle grades aged 9 to 13, and teenagers aged 14 to 18. Jury members must select books that feature a person with a disability as either the protagonist or secondary character. It is also up to the members to decide what qualifies as a disability and it is up to their discretion to determine if the character and book in question meets their qualifications. The books that are selected also must be written in English.

There are a lot of criteria that the jury has to keep in mind when they are reviewing books to win this award. The content of the book must provide

accurate information about disability and portray characters with disabilities as having a full life, not as people to be pitied. Representation of these characters should also be appropriate and not exaggerated and the theme must be appropriate for the intended audience. The style of the book should be well written and the plot and character development should be engaging and interesting. Finally, the layout and design should be neat and easy to follow.

It is important for picturebooks to include characters that are diverse because it is beneficial both to students who commonly see themselves in books and to students who do not find characters like them in the books they read. At first, the idea of including diverse characters was introduced in terms of including racially diverse characters, but since then there has been a push to include more diverse characters in terms of gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status and ability. Including characters that have disabilities, whether they are mental, physical or emotional is valuable for readers regardless of their ability level. When analyzing picturebooks, it is equally important to look at illustrations and read the text to get the full message that the author is sending.

### **Description of Books**

The four picturebooks that are being analyzed for this project are all winners of the Schneider Family Award, which honors books that embody the disability experience for adult and children audiences. The first book is *Zoom!*,

which was written by Robert Munsch in 2003. The character with a disability in this book is Laretta, who uses a wheelchair. The point of view of the story is third person and tells the story of Laretta shopping for a wheelchair. She wants her wheelchair to go as fast as possible and she ends up saving the day when she is able to rush her brother to the hospital after he cuts his finger.

The second book being used for this project is *My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Víctor* by Diane Gonzales Bertrand (2005). The story is told from the point of view of Victor's friend and describes the friendship that he shares with Victor. The two of them share a lot of fun and it is not until the end of the book that the reader discovers that Victor is in a wheelchair. This book was written in English and Spanish and both translations are written on the same page.

The next book that is being analyzed is Juan Felipe Herrera's *Featherless/Desplumado*, which was written in 2004. *Featherless/Desplumado* is told from the point of view of Tomasito, who has Spina Bifida and uses a wheelchair. Tomasito is discouraged that he cannot play soccer like the rest of his friends, but finds inspiration in a bird that his father buys him that also has a leg deformity. Eventually, Tomasito realizes the value in being different from other people and ends up playing soccer by hitting the ball with his head. This book, like *My Pal, Victor/Mi amigo, Víctor* is written in both Spanish and English, and has both translations on the same page.



The final book that will be analyzed is *Dear Santa, Please Come to the 19th Floor* by Yin. This book is about a boy, Carlos, who is disheartened because he is in a wheelchair and worries that Santa will not be able to bring him Christmas presents to his 19th floor New York apartment. The story is told from the point of view of Carlos' friend, Willy.

The ATOS readability formula levels texts based on characteristics that can be measured objectively, like sentence length and word difficulty. According to ATOS levelling, all four of these books fall between a 2.4 and 3.2 level, which means a text could most likely be read by a second grader in their fourth month of school to a third grader in their second month of school. This means that these four titles could plausibly be read independently by second graders and would be appropriate to be read aloud to students in lower elementary school, so around kindergarten through third grade.

## Analysis

<b><i>Zoom!</i></b> by Robert Munsch	
<b>Guided Question:</b> Do the illustrations promote ableism by addressing disability in stereotyped ways?	Illustrations of wheelchairs normalize disability. Laretta, the main character has independence and illustrations depict her as using her wheelchair without the assistance of other characters. When Laretta is using crutches (p 2,6,24,28), they are not the focal point of the page and are naturally part of the story. Other characters are illustrated with smiles, and are in close proximity to Laretta, which shows inclusion and acceptance of her when she is using her wheelchair. Laretta is illustrated as riding with smoke clouds behind her and the police in the background. This image of Laretta speeding down the road in a wheelchair goes against stereotypical portrayals of people who use wheelchairs as being frail, or being codependent.
<b>Guided Question:</b> Do loaded words convey negative messages about disability?	Laretta is never portrayed as being unable to do something because of her disability. The central focus of Laretta picking a wheelchair and wanting it to be the fastest one possible help portray her as having independence, and not as someone to be pitied or sheltered because of her disability. Laretta is not reliant on other people to make choices for her because she has the agency to choose for herself. Though people who have physical disabilities can be looked down on or patronized, there are no loaded words that indicate that Laretta is treated poorly because of her disability. There are not any adjectives used to describe Laretta in the book, but the conflicts that arise in the story, though centered around her wheelchair, do not convey negative messages about disability. One conflict that Laretta faces is that the wheelchairs she is trying out are “too slow”, even though she is described as riding on them as “very fast” (p 6, 8, 10). This destigmatizes the use of a wheelchair as negative and shows that it does not stop her from enjoying herself.

<b>Guided Question:</b> Does the book promote positive self-image for people with disabilities?	When Lauretta is in her wheelchair, she is illustrated with a smile which indicates that she is happy with herself. Lauretta is portrayed in a way that gives her agency to make her own choices. This book provides mirrors to people who have disabilities to see a character who is differently abled portrayed in a positive way. Readers who do not have disabilities are able to see disability in a positive light, with a storyline that is relatable and accessible to all people, providing them with “windows” that normalize disability.
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<b><i>My Pal, Victor/ Me amigo, Víctor</i></b> by Diane Gonzales Bertrand	
<b>Guided Question:</b> Do the illustrations promote ableism by addressing disability in stereotyped ways?	This illustrations in this book do not indicate that the character with disabilities, Victor, has disabilities until the last page, where it is shown that Victor uses a wheelchair. In the rest of the book, Victor is illustrated in the same way that the narrator is, with no differences in how the boys sit, play, or swim. Since the reader does not know that Victor has a disability, the illustrations do not promote ableism. Before the last page of the book, the text and illustration tells a story of two boys and their friendship. For the majority of the book, illustrations and text work together to describe the relationship between Victor and the narrator, Dominic. This changes on the last page, when without illustrations, it would be unknown that there is a character with disabilities in the story.
<b>Guided Question:</b> Do loaded words convey negative messages about disability?	The words that are used to describe Victor are positive and portray him as being a person who is creative, encouraging, funny, and active. The narrator describes Victor in a way that paints him as any other kid. Even the language that is used on the last page where the illustration indicates that Victor uses a wheelchair shows him as being accepting. All of the ways that Victor and his friendship with Dominic are described are not about his disability, but about him as a friend. The use of people first language conveys a positive message about Victor and does not define him as being someone who is disabled, but as a person and a friend first, with his disability not contributing to or defining his personality.

<p><b>Guided Question:</b> Does the book promote positive self-image for people with disabilities?</p>	<p>This book promotes positive self-image for people with disabilities because it focuses on all of the attributes that Victor possesses without need to mention the fact that he uses a wheelchair. Reading this book in a classroom which includes a student who uses a wheelchair, or even with another type of disability, can be meaningful because it shows people with disabilities how they are not so different from one another. Children who do not have disabilities can benefit from this book because it normalizes disability and shows a friendship in which they may be able to relate. People can be uncomfortable with what they do not know, and <i>My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor</i> could create an access point to start a conversation that aims to normalize disability for students who may be unfamiliar with it.</p>
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<b><i>Featherless/ Desplumado</i></b> by Juan Felipe Herrare	
<p><b>Guided Question:</b> Do the illustrations promote ableism by addressing disability in stereotyped ways?</p>	<p>The illustrations do not portray ableism in a stereotyped way. Though Tomasito is upset that people continue to ask him why he is in a wheelchair, he is depicted as having his own agency and does not rely on others in getting around. In the illustrations, the use of different colors help set the tone. The fiery red of the volcano in Tomasito's drawing (p 6) shows up other times in the story. The bird is confined to a cage and does not have feathers and thus is unable to fly, which parallels how Tomasito feels confined in his wheelchair and thinks he is unable to play soccer. The illustration of the soccer ball with wings on page 6 shows the relationship between being "featherless" and wanting to play soccer. There are other illustrations of a soccer ball throughout the book, drawn in proximity to Tomasito's bird, which visually represents the connection between the two ideas.</p>

<p><b>Guided Question:</b> Do loaded words convey negative messages about disability?</p>	<p>The words that could possibly convey negative messages about disability come from Tomasito, the character who has a disability in the story. Having people ask him why he is in a wheelchair is frustrating to Tomasito, and in turn he is struggling to make friends and fit in at his new school. This self doubt at first might portray the message that people with disabilities are trapped, or confined to their disability. However, Tomasito’s classmate, father, and soccer coach all use words that uplift and encourage him, which guide him in realizing how he is able to play soccer with his classmates, even if it looks different than how they play.</p>
<p><b>Guided Question:</b> Does the book promote positive self-image for people with disabilities?</p>	<p>This book could be a reflection on how people who have disabilities might feel. Though Tomasito is not happy with himself the whole book, he realizes what he is capable of and ends up feeling good about himself. Moving to a new school, making new friends, feeling limited, and overcoming obstacles are all phenomena that people of any ability can experience and understand. However, this story is important because it provides the necessary representation of disability to students in an accessible way. The parallel of Tomasito and his featherless bird can help all readers understand how Tomasito feels “flightless” because he does not play soccer in the same way his classmates do.</p>

<b><i>Dear Santa, Please Come to the 19th Floor</i></b> by Yin	
<b>Guided Question:</b> Do the illustrations promote ableism by addressing disability in stereotyped ways?	Most of the illustrations that portray Carlos in this book shows him as being pushed by or getting help from an able-bodied person in his wheelchair (p 2,3,5). This could promote ableism because it enforces the stereotype that people who use wheelchairs are incapable of being independent and must rely on others. Carlos often appears to be illustrated as upset, which plays into the stereotype that people with disabilities are unhappy with themselves or their situations. The reader learns that Carlos has recently been in an accident and his use of a wheelchair is new to him, which explains why he is illustrated as unhappy. The argument could be made that depicting Carlos as having a range of emotions does not promote ableism because he is experiencing feelings that able-bodied people can also experience. However, based on illustration, disability is presented in a generally stereotypical way.
<b>Guided Question:</b> Do loaded words convey negative messages about disability?	The words that are used in describing Carlos and those that are used by characters when they talk to him portray him positively. However, the words that he uses when talking about himself convey negative messages about disability. On page 10, when talking about Santa coming to visit his apartment, Carlos says “He would never come anyway. Santa doesn’t want to see me in a wheelchair”. This conveys the message that he is not deserving of something because he is in a wheelchair and portrays his using a wheelchair as something to be ashamed of. When Carlos is given a basketball he indicates that he does not believe he would be able to use it. “In case you haven’t noticed, Santa, I’m in a wheelchair” (p 36).

<p><b>Guided Question:</b> Does the book promote positive self-image for people with disabilities?</p>	<p>Carlos, has some self-image issues throughout the story. Since he has recently started to use a wheelchair, he has frustrations, doubts, and resentment about his disability. This could be a similar experience to someone else who has a type of disability, but are also experiences that people of all abilities have. Though at the beginning of the story, Carlos is struggling, there is hope at the end of the book. On page 36, the reader learns that Carlos and his friend both wrote Santa asking for gifts for the other. This shows that those with and without disabilities can share friendships and have compassion for each other and that people can be friends even if they are not “like” one another.</p>
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## Results

The results of these guided questions show that all four of the books depict characters with disability through illustrations that do not promote ableism, words that do not convey a negative message about disability, and promote positive self image for people with disabilities, all in varying degrees. All of these books portray disability in different ways, and the relationship that the characters with disabilities have with other characters and themselves are also different. In *Zoom!*, Laretta’s use of a wheelchair is the main plot point, but her attitude and interaction with her wheelchair is different from Tomasito in *Featherless/Desplumado* and Carlos in *Dear Santa, Please Come to the 19th Floor*. While Laretta finds joy in searching for the fastest wheelchair that she can use, Tomasito and Carlos struggle with the fact that they use a wheelchair and even view it as barriers for what they want. All three of these characters vary from

how Victor is portrayed in *My Pal, Victor/ Me amigo, Víctor* because his disability is not a plot point to the story. The way that his disability is portrayed is fairly neutral and his use of a wheelchair neither contributes nor prohibits him from doing what he wants with his friend.

Though this analysis does not necessarily give a clear “winner” as to which book best portrays characters with disabilities, it shows that there are a variety of ways in which disabilities can be portrayed in picturebooks. Each depiction sends a different message to the audience, and can serve as windows and mirrors to readers in different ways from each other. Just as the main characters’ experiences with disabilities are all different, no child’s experience with disability is the same as another’s. These differences, the highs and lows of using a wheelchair, can be useful mirrors for people who are able bodied and have not experienced what the characters in these books have.

### **Lesson Plans**

Though the books that were analyzed for this project are picturebooks, there is value to sharing them to an audience of any age. Any of the four titles that were analyzed could be used in lessons for students as young as Kindergarten, but they could also be used for students at other grade levels as well. The activities and discussions that are centered around the text will differ depending on the grade level, but the root of the lessons is providing students



windows and mirrors of disability through characters in the books. These books could be used to write one lesson, be the start to a mini unit, or used as part of a text set for a larger unit. I chose to write two lesson plans based off of *My Pal, Victor/ Me amigo, Víctor* and one on *Zoom!* for elementary grades, though any of them could be modified to be used for other grades as well.

In all of these lessons, it is important to include a class discussion and also give students time to reflect. This is beneficial to students at any grade level to allow them to make more meaning out of what they are learning. Through all of the activities listed below, students are being exposed to stories of people that might be different from them, which is an important step in helping them learn how to be inclusive and compassionate people.

### Lesson Plan 1

The first plan is an example of a lesson that could be taught as an independent lesson, or as the start to a mini unit. After this lesson, the teacher could share other resources (books, articles, videos, etc.) that feature a person with disabilities, and then students can compare those experiences to Victor's. This will provide students with more exposure to the experiences of those with disabilities and allow them to find additional similarities they may share. If teaching this to younger students, the teacher could have them draw pictures in

their t-charts instead of writing, and older students could write a paragraph to compare and contrast their traits with Victor's.

<b>Lesson Title/Description:</b> <i>My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor</i>		
<b>Lesson #</b>	<b>of</b>	<b>Time Allotted for this Lesson:</b> 30 minutes
<b>Standards:</b> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.		<b>Learning Targets:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I can describe traits of a character using the words and pictures of a book.</li> <li>● I can compare and contrast characteristics between myself and a character.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials/Equipment/Supplies/Technology/Preparation:</b> <i>My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor</i> , student notebooks, whiteboard		
<b>Procedure: Teacher Does.....</b>		<b>Procedure: Students Do.....</b>
<b>Time</b> 2 min	<b>Opening:</b> Teacher will gather students together and ask them to turn to the person next to them and share an activity they like to do for fun. Then, teacher will 3-4 students to raise their hand and share what they talked to their partner about.	<b>Opening:</b> Students will gather together and then take turns sharing with their partner an activity they like to do for fun. Then, students will raise their hand to share with the whole class what they shared with their neighbors.
8 min	<b>Teaching:</b> Teacher will show them the front cover of "My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor" and explain that they will be reading a book about two boys and what they like to do for fun. Ask the students to notice character traits of Victor during the read aloud. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What are some things Victor and Dominic like to do?</li> <li>● What words are used to describe him?</li> </ul> Teacher will read the book aloud to students.	<b>Teaching:</b> Students will listen and watch as the teacher reads the book aloud and take notice of what the two characters like to do for fun.

10 min	<p><b>Independent Application:</b> Teacher will guide students in making a t-chart to compare themselves to Victor by drawing one on the board and filling in the left side with “similarities” and the right with “differences”. Teacher will write an example of one similarity and one difference between themselves and Victor and ask the students to work on their own t-charts.</p> <p>While students work on t-charts, teacher will walk around and help students by asking guiding questions, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was an activity that Victor did in the book? Do you like doing that?</li> <li>• What did the narrator say about Victor? Is that how you would describe yourself?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Independent Application:</b> Students will watch as the teacher shows how to make the t-chart to compare the similarities and differences between themselves and Victor. Students will draw their own t-chart in their notebooks and write Victor and (name) as the title and label the left side “similarities” and the right “differences”.</p> <p>Students will fill in their t-charts with their own similarities and differences between them and Victor. Students will ask teacher questions as needed.</p>
5 min	<p><b>Group Application:</b> Teacher will have students share their charts with their neighbors.</p> <p>Teacher will ask students to raise their hands to share what they noticed about their t-charts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which side of the t-chart had more items?</li> <li>• What does this show you about people with disabilities?</li> </ul> <p>Discuss with students how people with disabilities may look different than them, but they probably have more in common with each other</p>	<p><b>Group Application:</b> Students will turn to their neighbor and share some items of their list with each other.</p> <p>Students will share some of their similarities/differences with the class, and which side of the t-chart had more items.</p>

	<p>than they might think. Teacher will pose questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you know anybody who has a disability?</li> <li>• How do you think people with disabilities are treated sometimes?</li> <li>• What are some ways you could include somebody who has a disability?</li> </ul> <p>When asking these questions, it is important to be mindful that students' experiences with disability will vary, and not all students may feel comfortable sharing.</p>	<p>Students will engage in class discussion about people with disabilities, share if they have any experiences with people who have a disability.</p>
5 min	<p><b>Closure:</b> Teacher will ask students to write 1-2 sentences about what they did in class to a friend that was not there.</p>	<p><b>Closure:</b> Students will write 1-2 sentences to explain what they did to a friend that was absent in class.</p>

## Lesson Plan 2

Like the first lesson, the second could be used as a single lesson, or as part of a larger unit. In the lesson below, after reading the book, students write an “I Am” poem from the perspective of Victor in, *My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor*. An alternative option for students could be giving them the choice to write their poem from Victor’s perspective or his friend, Dominic’s. As part of a larger unit, the teacher could share additional stories that feature people with disabilities, discuss these characters, and then have students choose one character’s perspective to use for their “I Am” poem. They could also have students write

their own “I Am” poems and compare them to their poems about the characters. I have provided one template that could be used for these poems, which can be modified depending on the grade level. These poems can be taken to the next level by having students type or write a final draft version of their poems or draw pictures to go along with it.

<b>Lesson Title/Description:</b> <i>My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor</i>		
<b>Lesson #</b>	<b>of</b>	<b>Time Allotted for this Lesson:</b> 40 minutes
<b>Standards:</b> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).		<b>Learning Targets:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I can describe traits of a character using text and illustrations.</li> <li>● I can create an “I Am” poem from the perspective of a character.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials/Equipment/Supplies/Technology/Preparation:</b> <i>My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor</i> , “I Am” poem templates, “I Am” poem example, whiteboard		
<b>Procedure: Teacher Does.....</b>		<b>Procedure: Students Do.....</b>
5 min	<b>Teaching:</b> Teacher will read <i>My Pal, Victor/ Mi amigo, Victor</i> aloud to students, asking them to notice characteristics of Victor and the way he is illustrated.	<b>Teaching:</b> Students will listen to the book being read, notice descriptions of Victor, and look at the illustrations in the book.
5 min	<b>Group Application:</b> Teacher will ask students to share with their neighbor some things they noticed about Victor. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How did the narrator describe Victor?</li> <li>● What are some activities he likes to do?</li> </ul> Teacher will ask students to raise their hand and share what they	<b>Group Application:</b> Students will share some of the things they noticed about Victor in the book: the way he was described by his friend, the activities he liked to do, his mood, etc.

	discussed with their partners, writing down answers on the board in a list for all students to see.	
10 min	<p><b>Teaching:</b></p> <p>Teacher will share an “I Am” poem with students (one that they have written themselves, or an example that they have found). Teacher will point out that each line starts with “I am...” and describes something about the narrator.</p> <p>Teacher will explain to students that they will be writing an “I Am” poem from the perspective of Victor. Students are allowed to be creative with things they might not know about Victor, and use the ideas that they brainstormed earlier in the lesson to help them fill their poems out.</p>	<p><b>Teaching:</b></p> <p>Students will watch as the teacher shares the “I Am” poem, and listen as they describe the pattern and characteristics of the poem.</p>
15 min	<p><b>Independent Application:</b></p> <p>Teacher will give each student the “I Am” poem template and walk around the classroom to help students as needed.</p> <p>If a student is stuck with a prompt, teacher can help them out by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Asking them to think about their answer to the prompt. Do you think that Victor would have the same answer? Why or why not?</li> <li>● Having students look at the board and use brainstormed ideas to spur them on. “If Victor likes _____, do you think that means he _____?”</li> </ul>	<p><b>Independent Application:</b></p> <p>Students will fill out their “I Am” poems using the templates provided by their teacher, being as creative as they want to be. They can ask their neighbor for ideas, use the whiteboard brainstorm for inspiration and ask the teacher if they have any other questions.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explaining that there are no wrong answers when it comes to writing these poems.</li> </ul>	
5 min	<b>Closure:</b> Teacher will have students read their poems out loud to their neighbors to see their similarities and differences and then turn their poems in.	<b>Closure:</b> Students will share their poems with their neighbors, and discuss the similarities and differences between them.

### "I Am" Poem Template

**"I AM" POEM**

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I wonder \_\_\_\_\_

I hear \_\_\_\_\_

I see \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

I pretend \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I worry \_\_\_\_\_

I hope \_\_\_\_\_

I try \_\_\_\_\_

I wish \_\_\_\_\_

I understand \_\_\_\_\_

I say \_\_\_\_\_



I dream \_\_\_\_\_

I imagine \_\_\_\_\_

I believe \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

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### Lesson Plan 3

The third lesson is a simple one using the book *Zoom!* and is intended for lower elementary students. It is mostly discussion based, but additional activities could be inserted depending on the goal of the lesson and the grade level. After the class discussion, students could be asked to write a few sentences to summarize the book, or to write about what they learned about people with disabilities. Another idea is for students to get into small groups and create their own story with a character that uses a wheelchair, or a story that continues the tale of Laretta and her wheelchair. Then, students could act out their stories for the rest of the class. As with the other lessons, this one could be used in a larger unit, or for different grade levels.

<b>Lesson Title/Description:</b> <i>Zoom!</i>		
<b>Lesson #</b>	<b>of</b>	<b>Time Allotted for this Lesson:</b> 35 minutes
<b>Standards:</b> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2 Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.		<b>Learning Targets:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can explain the events of a story, using pictures and text.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials/Equipment/Supplies/Technology/Preparation:</b> <i>Zoom!</i> , coloring supplies (crayons, colored pencils, pencils), flipchart		
<b>Procedure: Teacher Does.....</b>		<b>Procedure: Students Do.....</b>
<b>Time</b> 5 min	<b>Opening:</b> Teacher will ask students to share what they know about disabilities-preconceptions they may have, what they've seen in books/movies, and personal experiences. Teacher will explain that the class will be reading a book about a girl shopping for a new wheelchair.	<b>Opening:</b> Students will think about and share what they know about disabilities.



10 min	<p><b>Teaching:</b> Teacher will read <i>Zoom!</i> aloud to students, pointing out illustrations along the way and asking questions to engage students, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you notice about ____?</li> <li>• What do you think will happen next?</li> <li>• How do you think Lauretta feels about ____?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teaching:</b> Students will listen as the teacher reads the book, look at illustrations, and answer questions about the story.</p>
8 min	<p><b>Group Application:</b> Teacher will ask students to recall the events of the story with a neighbor.</p> <p>Teacher will have students share what they remember about what happened in the book, and record events on a flip chart. Teacher will prompt students to tell the story in order and ask them to remember what they talked about during the read aloud.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did Lauretta feel about that? How do we know?</li> <li>• What happened after that?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Group Application:</b> Students will share what they remember about the story with their neighbor.</p> <p>Students will share details that they remember about the story, using discussion with their neighbor and answers to questions during the read aloud.</p>
10 min	<p><b>Independent Application:</b> Teacher will explain to students that they will be drawing a picture based off of their favorite part of the story, and write 1-2 sentences to explain their drawing.</p> <p>While students are drawing, teacher will check in on students and answer questions as needed.</p>	<p><b>Independent Application:</b> Students will draw a picture of their favorite part of the book, using ideas from the chart and the class discussion. Then, students will write 1-2 sentences to explain what is happening in their drawings.</p>
2 min	<p><b>Closure:</b> Teacher will give students time to share their drawings and</p>	<p><b>Closure:</b> Students will share their drawings and description with the person</p>

	descriptions with their neighbors and then collect the drawings from each student.	next to them and then turn in their work to the teacher
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Example worksheet that could be used for students' drawings:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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In addition to these lessons, there are other activities that could be taught using *My Pal, Victor/ Me amigo, Víctor*. Examples of activities for students include:

- Write a pledge or promise about how they will support people with disabilities in the future.
- As a group, create a PSA to the class that educates them about what you have learned from reading this book.

- After reading the book, watch a video that highlights the experience of a person with disabilities. Write a paragraph to describe the similarities and differences between the person in the video and Victor.
- Have a class discussion about the message of the book. What other books, TV shows, movies, songs, or real life situations have you encountered that have a similar message?
- Have a discussion about equity and come up with a new classroom rule/expectation based on *My Pal, Victor*/ *Me amigo, Víctor*. How can you use what you have learned from this book to make sure that the rules are fair or “equitable” for all students?

### **Moving Forward**

While this analysis of picturebooks that feature characters with disabilities is important, it is not where this conversation should stop. Classroom libraries should include a variety of books to offer to students. The four books that I analyzed are all examples of diversity in representation that should be available for students to read. There are hundreds of other titles that can be included in libraries that can serve as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors to students. In addition to including books that feature characters who are in a wheelchair, there are many other types of disabilities that should be represented. Children

should be exposed to a wide variety of experiences, so students should also be introduced to books that include characters with different types of disability. There are, of course, other types of physical disabilities besides ones that lead to someone using a wheelchair, and there are also mental disabilities that are invisible to the eye. While having main characters with disability allows students a more direct window into the experience of a person with a disability may have, simply including characters with disabilities as part of a story and presenting them in a non ableist way can also be effective. Having a character with a disability in the background of a page in a picturebook, and not drawing negative attention to the fact is a way to normalize disability.

Classroom libraries should be full of diverse texts that have variety in characters and difficulty level. In primary grades especially, the classroom library should provide hundreds of titles for students to choose from so that they are able to read books that they are interested in and are appropriate for their reading level. In this analysis, four picturebooks were examined that feature characters with disabilities and while all of these would be beneficial to include in a classroom library or read aloud to students, there are many other picturebooks that have characters with disabilities in them. These additional titles were selected not only because they include characters with disabilities or differences, but because they are high quality in story-telling and illustration.

## Additional Titles

- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Pena- This book, a Newbery award winner and Caldecott honor book from 2016, is about a boy and his grandma travelling through town on the bus. As they go, the boy meets a man who is blind, and there is also a character who is in a wheelchair illustrated on one of the pages, depicting disability in a positive way.
- *A Splash of Red* by Jen Bryant- Based on a true story, this book tells of Horace Pippin, who grew up with a passion for painting. After being injured during World War I, Pippin thought he would never be able to paint again. Eventually, he discovers how he can paint despite his injury and becomes a successful artist.
- *The Pirate of Kindergarten* by George Ella Lyon- Ginny is unable to do well in Kindergarten because she sees two of everything. After going to the doctor, she learns that she has double vision and is able to get an eye patch that will improve her sight and allow her to be more successful in her class.
- *My Travelin' Eye* by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw- Jenny Sue has a "travelin' eye", which moves around while the other is able to stay still. She goes to the doctor and learns that she has a lazy eye and must wear an eye patch in order to improve her eyesight. At first she is teased for her eye patch,

but eventually embraces it when she designs “fashion patches” that are pretty and unique.

- *My Sister, Alicia May* by Nancy Tupper Ling- This story is told by Rachel, whose younger sister, Alicia May has Down Syndrome. Though Rachel admits that her sister is not always easy to have around, she loves Alicia May and appreciates the special qualities that she has.
- *Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah* by Laurie Ann Thompson and Sean Qualls- This book tells of Emmanuel, who is from Ghana and was born with a deformed leg. He hopped to school two miles each day, and learned how to ride a bike. In 2001, he gained attention when he cycled 400 miles across Ghana and shared the powerful message that disability does not mean inability.
- *A Different Little Doggy* by Heather Whittaker- Taz is a miniature Pinscher who looks different than other dogs, is getting old, and is blind. Despite these differences, she is loved and accepted by other dogs and lives a happy and vibrant life.
- *Can I Play Too?* By Mo Willems- Gerald and Piggie want to play catch when a snake friend comes along and wants to join. The duo must creatively solve how to include Snake in their game even though he does not have arms to catch with.

## **In Closing**

Through my research and analysis, I discovered that I will be constantly learning what it means to be a well-informed educator and how to choose stories that are representative of all communities. This project covers just the tip of the iceberg on the importance of reading books that serve as windows to those who generally see themselves in stories and as mirrors to those who generally do not. As I select texts for my future classrooms, I will be able to use the general idea of the guided questions from this analysis as a model for selecting books that represent people in other marginalized communities. It is encouraging to know that there is a way to look for and choose stories that are empowering to all people, and it is something that will always be relevant and important.

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